

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A cart for transporting objects, said cart comprising:
  - a base structure upon which the objects may be disposed, said base structure having posterior and anterior ends and opposing first and second sides;
  - a pair of first wheels mounted to the base structure and disposed toward a first side of the base structure;
  - a pair of second wheels mounted to the base structure and disposed toward a second side of the base structure;
  - a housing mounted to the base structure and at least partially defining an interior channel, said housing extending in a longitudinal direction of the cart and being disposed midway along a width of the cart;
  - an elongated tongue adapted for connection to another cart, said tongue being at least partially disposed in the channel and being movable between a retracted position, wherein a majority of the tongue is disposed inside the channel, and an extended position, wherein a majority of the tongue is disposed outside the channel; and
  - an actuator connected to the tongue and disposed laterally outward from the housing, said actuator being operable, upon manipulation by an operator, to move the tongue from the retracted position to the extended position.
2. The cart of claim 1, wherein the actuator is movable along a linear path between a deactivated position and an activated position, wherein movement of the actuator from the deactivated position to the activated position moves the tongue from the retracted position to the extended position.
3. The cart of claim 2, wherein the path of the actuator is horizontal.
4. The cart of claim 3, wherein the path extends in the longitudinal direction of the cart.

5. The cart of claim 4, wherein the actuator is connected to the tongue by an elongated extension rod, said rod extending laterally outward from the tongue at about a right angle from the tongue.

6. The cart of claim 5, further comprising front and rear structures and first and second side structures secured to the base structure and extending upwardly therefrom.

7. The cart of claim 5, wherein the actuator is spaced below the base structure.

8. The cart of claim 7, wherein the actuator is a foot plate having a planar contact surface disposed perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the cart.

9. The cart of claim 8, wherein when the foot plate is in the activated position, the foot plate is disposed proximate to a front one of the first wheels, and when the foot plate is in the deactivated position, the foot plate is disposed distal to the front one of the first wheels.

10. The cart of claim 9, wherein the foot plate has an outermost vertical edge that is disposed inwardly from an outermost portion of the base structure on the first side of the base structure.

11. The cart of claim 10, wherein the outermost vertical edge of the foot plate is disposed laterally outward from the first wheels when circumferences of the first wheels are aligned.

12. The cart of claim 5, wherein the actuator is disposed laterally outward from the base structure.

13. The cart of claim 12, wherein the actuator is vertically aligned with the base structure.

14. The cart of claim 13, wherein the base structure comprises a frame having first and second side bars at the first and second sides of the base structure, respectively, said first side bar having at least one slot formed therein, said at least one slot extending in the longitudinal direction of the cart, and wherein the actuator is mounted to the first side bar so as to be movable along the at least one slot.

15. The cart of claim 14, wherein the extension rod extends through the at least one slot and is secured to the actuator on a laterally outward side of the at least one slot.

16. The cart of claim 15, wherein the first side bar comprises a bottom wall joined between a pair of opposing inner and outer side walls, wherein the at least one slot comprises a pair of aligned slots formed in the inner and outer side walls, respectively, and wherein the actuator is disposed adjacent an outer surface of the outer side wall and covers a portion of the slot formed therein.

17. The cart of claim 16, wherein the aligned slots are partially defined by interior front and rear edges of the inner and outer side walls, respectively, and wherein the interior front edges determine the activated position of the actuator and the interior rear edges determine the deactivated position of the actuator.

18. The cart of claim 17, further comprising a roller through which the extension rod extends, said roller being supported on the bottom wall of the first side bar, between the inner and outer side walls of the first side bar.

19. The cart of claim 18, wherein the actuator comprises a block-shaped pedal.

20. The cart of claim 2, wherein the actuator is connected to the tongue by a cable.

21. The cart of claim 20, wherein the path of the actuator is vertical.

22. The cart of claim 21, further comprising vertically-extending first and second posts disposed at opposing front corners of the cart, respectively, said first post having a vertically extending slot formed therein, said slot being partially defined by interior top and bottom edges of the first post, and wherein the actuator is mounted to the first post for movement along the slot.

23. The cart of claim 22, wherein the interior top edge determines the activated position of the actuator and the interior bottom edge determines the deactivated position of the actuator.

24. The cart of claim 23, wherein the actuator comprises a grip and a connector body, said grip being disposed adjacent an outer surface of the first post and covering a portion of the slot, and said connector body being disposed inside the first post.

25. The cart of claim 24, wherein a first end of the cable is connected to the connector body, inside the first post, and a second end of the cable is connected to a rear portion of the tongue.

26. The cart of claim 25, further comprising a plurality of pulleys around which the cable extends, said pulleys changing the direction of the cable at least twice.

27. The cart of claim 26, wherein the plurality of pulleys comprises a first pulley mounted to the first post so as to be rotatable around a horizontal axis and a second pulley mounted to the base structure so as to be rotatable around a vertical axis.

28. The cart of claim 27, wherein the first pulley is disposed inside the first post and the second pulley is disposed inside the base structure.

29. The cart of claim 1, further comprising a tongue locking apparatus selectively operable to lock the tongue in the extended and retracted positions.

30. The cart of claim 1, wherein the housing comprises a bottom wall having a roller opening formed therein, wherein a first roller is mounted to the bottom wall and at least partially extends through the roller opening, and wherein a second roller is mounted to the tongue, and wherein the tongue is movably supported above the bottom wall of the housing by the first and second rollers.

31. A cart for transporting objects, said cart comprising:

a base structure upon which the objects may be disposed, said base structure having posterior and anterior ends and opposing first and second sides;

a pair of first wheels mounted to the base structure and disposed toward the first side of the base structure;

a pair of second wheels mounted to the base structure and disposed toward the second side of the base structure;

a housing mounted to the base structure and at least partially defining an interior channel, said housing extending in a longitudinal direction of the cart and being disposed midway along a width of the cart;

an elongated coupling tongue adapted for connection to another cart, said coupling tongue being at least partially disposed in the channel and being movable between a retracted position, wherein a majority of the coupling tongue is disposed inside the channel, and an extended position, wherein a majority of the coupling tongue is disposed outside the channel and forwardly of the anterior end of the base structure;

a tongue actuator connected to the coupling tongue and operable, upon manipulation by an operator, to move the coupling tongue from the retracted position to the extended position;

a hitch apparatus mounted to the base structure at the posterior end thereof, said hitch apparatus comprising:

a hitch disposed midway along the width of the cart and defining a tongue-receiving space for receiving a second coupling tongue of a second cart; and

a locking assembly including a pin movable between a locking position, wherein the pin extends through the space to lock the second tongue of the second cart to the hitch, and a release position, wherein the pin is disposed above the space to unlock the second tongue of the second cart from the hitch; and

a hitch actuator connected to the pin of the locking assembly and disposed laterally outward from the hitch, said hitch actuator being operable, upon manipulation by an operator, to move the pin from the locking position to the release position.

32. The cart of claim 31, further comprising front and rear structures and first and second side structures secured to the base structure and extending upwardly therefrom.

33. The cart of claim 32, further comprising a cable connected to the pin, said cable extending upwardly and then laterally outwardly from the pin, said cable being movably attached to the rear structure.

34. The cart of claim 33, wherein the rear structure comprises a laterally-extending upper rear bar, and wherein the cable is movably attached to the upper rear bar by a bracket.

35. The cart of claim 34, wherein the hitch actuator comprises a handle loop formed in the cable, said handle loop being laterally movable between deactivated and activated positions, wherein movement of the handle loop from the deactivated position to the activated position moves the pin from the locking position to the release position.

36. The cart of claim 31, wherein the hitch apparatus further comprises an actuator bar having a body with first and second end portions, said second end portion being joined to the pin, said actuator bar being pivotally mounted to the base structure so as to be pivotable about a pivot axis between an activated position, wherein the pin is disposed in the locking position, and a deactivated position, wherein the pin is disposed in the release position.

37. The cart of claim 36, wherein the center of mass of the actuator bar is disposed between the pivot axis and the second end portion, whereby the actuator bar is biased by gravity toward the activated position.

38. The cart of claim 37, wherein the base structure comprises a rear bar, and wherein said hitch comprises upper and lower hitch plates joined to the rear bar and extending outwardly therefrom, said upper and lower hitch plates being vertically spaced apart so as to form the tongue-receiving space therebetween.

39. The cart of claim 38, further comprising first and second bumpers joined to the rear bar and extending rearwardly therefrom, said first and second bumpers being disposed toward the first and second sides of the base structure, respectively, and wherein the first bumper comprises a center plate spaced rearward from the rear bar so as to form a vertically-extending passage therebetween.

40. The cart of claim 39, wherein the hitch actuator comprises a foot plate connected to the first end portion of the body of the actuator bar, said foot plate extending through the vertically-extending passage formed between the rear bar and the center plate of the first bumper, and wherein a top edge of the foot plate is disposed above the first bumper when the foot plate is in the activated position, whereby an operator may step on the top edge of the foot plate to move the foot plate downward,

thereby pivoting the actuator bar from the activated position to the deactivated position.

41. The cart of claim 40, wherein the first bumper is channel-shaped and further comprises inner and outer arms joined to opposing ends of the center plate and extending forwardly therefrom at substantially right angles, said inner and outer arms having forward ends joined to the rear bar.

42. The cart of claim 41, wherein the foot plate is connected to the first end portion of the body by an L-shaped neck, said foot plate and neck cooperating to define a slot within which the inner arm of the first bumper is disposed.

43. The cart of claim 39, wherein the hitch apparatus further comprises an actuator plate pivotally connected to the rear bar, below the activator bar, said actuator plate comprising an actuator finger.

44. The cart of claim 43, wherein the hitch actuator comprises a cable connected to the actuator plate, wherein the application of a pulling force to the cable causes the actuator plate to pivot so as to bring the actuator finger into contact with the actuator bar and to move the actuator bar to the deactivated position.

45. The cart of claim 40, wherein the tongue actuator is connected to the tongue by an elongated extension rod, said rod extending laterally outward from the tongue at about a right angle from the tongue, and wherein the tongue actuator is a second foot plate having a planar contact surface disposed perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the cart.

46. The cart of claim 45, wherein when the foot plate is in the activated position, the foot plate is disposed proximate to a front one of the first wheels, and when the foot plate is in the deactivated position, the foot plate is disposed distal to the front one of the first wheels.